

THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE 1955-59



1st April 1955



***"With God's help,
faith in the good
fight, the
support of the
entire Greek
population and
the help of the
Cypriot people,
WE ENTER INTO
THE STRUGGLE TO
THROW OFF THE
BRITISH YOKE.
Our slogan is one
that has been
handed to us by
our forefathers
as a sacred
heritage:
"VICTORY OR
DEATH".***

"BROTHER CYPRIOTS,

From the depths of the centuries all those who have glorified Greek history in their struggle to preserve freedom gaze upon us...

The whole of Hellenism, which watches us anxiously, and with national pride, gazes upon us.

Let us reply with our deeds that we will be "braver than the bravest"...

INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMATS,

Look upon your work. It is shameful that in the 20th century peoples must shed their blood in order to obtain the God-given gift of freedom, for which we too

have fought at the side of your peoples and for which you at least claim to have fought against Nazism and Fascism.

GREEKS,

Wherever you might be, hear our voice:

Forward!

ALL TOGETHER FOR FREEDOM FOR CYPRUS.

E.O.K.A., THE LEADER DHIGENIS".

These were just some of the demands put forward by the Greek-Cypriots in the first EOKA proclamation, when on the morning of 1st April 1955 they were embarking on the struggle for liberation. The goal of the struggle was to throw off the British colonial yoke and to fulfil the wish of the entire Greek-Cypriot people for union with Greece.

In the historic plebiscite of the 15th of January 1950, by which the Greeks of Cyprus expressed their deepest wish, 97% of the Greek population voted for union with Greece.

The demand for union with Greece goes back much further than that, however. Cyprus, an integral part of the Hellenic world, had been left outside the boundaries of the Greek State, and therefore the desire of its people to return to the national homeland was entirely natural.

However, Britain's colonial policy left no room for hope. The first dynamic reaction to colonial subjugation was the 1931 uprising. The October uprising, as it has become known, marked the first dynamic and bloody attack by the Greeks of Cyprus against colonial rule.

The movement was put down and there followed a period of terrorism, suppression of national feeling and systematic silencing of the people. It was forbidden to raise the Greek flag and play the Greek national anthem.



An everyday scene in the streets of Cyprus: searches, arrests, torture...

Schoolchildren on the front line of the struggle

Greek poet George Seferis recorded the prevailing climate on his visit to Cyprus in 1953. He addresses the British in order to remind them that:

*"The land has no metal rings
That they may pull it up and carry it away [...]
And these bodies
Made of a soil they do not know,
Have souls.
They gather implements that they might change them.
They cannot; they can merely undo them
If souls can be undone".*

("Salamis of Cyprus".)

In his diary Seferis also recorded the desperate longing of the Greek-Cypriots for vindication of their national desires and in photographs taken during his visit, he preserves the predominant slogan:

"We hunger for Greece though we are fed only stones".



Imprisoned Graves. The British buried 13 heroes of the struggle here in secret in order to avoid popular demonstrations.

The 1st of April 1955, the day on which began the epic 1955-59 struggle for Enosis – or union with Greece, was a day of national pride and rebirth for the whole of Hellenism. The people's passion for freedom and for Greece, the refusal to accept colonial subjugation and slavery, the determination to fight and the will for dignity and honour, eventually led to a titanic and bloody struggle. A struggle marked by holocausts and heroes' sacrifices. The E.O.K.A struggle was above all a struggle of youth. The young men and women of E.O.K.A were imprisoned in concentration camps, suffered under torture, died heroes' deaths in ambush, climbed on to



The Kokkinotrimithia Detention Centre. The colonial powers may have imprisoned the freedom fighters, but their soul and their spirit remained free

the gallows chanting the national anthem and were burned to death in their hideouts rather than surrender.

The 1955-59 struggle was a hard, determined, persistent struggle fought on many fronts. It was a war fought in hideouts, in ambush, in the detention centres against the cruelty of the interrogators, on the gallows which the freedom fighters faced with a song and a smile on their lips, in the towns with the curfews, the pamphlets and the militant demonstrations:

*"When we had run out of hope
With telegrams and embassies,
We folded up our little lives in an envelope
Small enough to fit in a schoolgirl's fist,
On a bicycle lamp, on a book's spine
And with red ink addressed it:*

*To the Greek-Cypriot People
Freedom or Death Street, Towns and Villages
of Cyprus".*

This was how the poet Yiannis Papadopoulos described the experiences of the Greek-Cypriots at that time.



The sacrifice of Gregoris Afxentiou opened the way for national dignity and honour



The fields of sacrifice were endless:

Mersinaki,

Machairas, Liopetri,

Dikomo.

And the roll call of the heroic dead is long:

Mouskos,

Demetriou, Karaolis,

Drakos, Afxentiou,

Pallikarides,

Lenas, Karyos,

Samaras, Pittas,

Papakyriacou,

Matsis...

The schoolboy hero **Evagoras Pallikarides** who, in March 1957, at the age of only 18, was led to the gallows deserves special mention. When he left school in order to take to the mountains and join the struggle, he wrote to his schoolmates:

"Former schoolmates,

At this time one among you is missing. One who has gone in search of some fresh air. One whom you may never see alive again. Do not weep on his grave. Do not mourn for him. Only scatter a few May flowers on his grave. That is enough for him.

I will take an uphill path

I will scale the mountains

I will find the blessed steps

That will lead to freedom".

Thus, with a smile upon his lips he climbed on to the gallows.

Another hero worthy of mention was the standard-bearing pupil of Famagusta High School **Petrakis Yiallourous**, who in a combative demonstration was shot dead by the British.

The struggle against British Rule was a hard one. It was fought on both the military and the political arenas. Schoolchildren participated dynamically under A.N.E (The E.O.K.A Youth Organisation). Under the leadership of the Ethnarch **MAKARIOS** and General George Grivas-DHIGENIS the Greeks of Cyprus wrote new heroic pages in the history of Hellenism.

The struggle may not have led to fulfilment of the great dream of union with Greece, but it did lead to the end of colonial rule and the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus. And this was in the end a victory of Hellenism and freedom over colonial arbitrariness and omnipotence.



*The standard-bearing schoolboy
Petrakis Yiallourous, always in the
vanguard of demonstrations*



*Under the leadership of Ethnarch Makarios and Dhigenis
the Greeks of Cyprus wrote heroic pages
in the history of Hellenism*

The E.O.K.A struggle was above all a struggle of the young. The entire Greek world bows its head to them and salutes their heroic sacrifice, for they were examples of honour and heroism, examples of courage and endurance. In times of crisis for the nation the struggle of the Greeks of Cyprus, the struggle of E.O.K.A. opened the way for endurance, determination, national dignity and honour. This was the message sent out by the suffering Cypriots to Greeks all over the world.



Cyprus is free! The freedom fighters return victorious and vindicated



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